

“Melopoetic Composition”: Reading Music in Sarah Grand’s *The Heavenly Twins* and George Egerton’s *Keynotes and Discords*

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The arts are an endless semblance, an endless dissembling – and a collaboration among several arts is at once a labyrinth and a thread that needs to be followed.

–Daniel Albright([1](#))

All art constantly aspires to the condition of music.

–Walter Pater([2](#))

<1> Playing on the well-known Walter Pater quote, William Freedman writes, “All art may not constantly aspire to the condition (or structure or effects) of music, but a substantial body of nineteenth- and twentieth-century fiction does” ([1](#)). True—and yet, so much in the nineteenth century has been overlooked, with critics preferring to examine the seemingly groundbreaking work of Modernism in musico-literary blending.[\(3\)](#) In an effort to correct this imbalance, this article examines the use of music in the form and composition of Sarah Grand’s *The Heavenly Twins* (1893) and George Egerton’s short story collections *Keynotes* (1893) and *Discords* (1894). Both Grand and Egerton include musical notation in their work, an unusual device and a fascinating blending of music and literary composition. Egerton actually assigns a particular chord or key to certain short stories, and Grand includes musical notation in *The Heavenly Twins* a total of twelve times. *The Heavenly Twins* is divided into separate books, which, like the movements of a symphony, have their own variation, sound, feel, and speed, while maintaining the overall theme of the work. Egerton names her collections using musical terms—keynotes, disc(h)ords, symphonies, fantasias—as though she, too, is creating her own opus. Grand and Egerton both blended the two art forms—literature and music—and in doing so experimented with narrative form and style, creating a new form of literature and covertly composing music in their fiction.

<2> The compositional links between music and literature have long been acknowledged but have only recently been formalized. While critical attention has been paid to music *in* literature, little note is taken of music and literature combined. This article, then, is situated at the convergence of words and music, in the grey area at the border between music and literary study, where “words and music join forces” (Bernhart 5), the exploration of which John Daverio writes is “a respectable scholarly and critical endeavor” but “a tricky business”(qtd. in Scher “Revisited” 9). Called a variety of things – musico-literary study (Kafalenos 275), musico-literary intermediality (Wolf “Intermediality” 37), interart studies (Scher “Revisited” 9) – this intersection provided a new level of compositional autonomy for the New Woman writers, disputing the general conception that musical “women lacked true originality and could only produce work that imitated that of men” (Fuller 34). Sophie Fuller writes of “the commonly-held belief that a great woman composer [was] an impossibility,” an idea that pervaded the nineteenth-century musical world (27). Perhaps, then, composing music in literature, and a blending of the two compositional forms, allowed Victorian women writers a space in which to experiment with musical composition in a socially acceptable form: literary composition. These women were denied the necessary and complex tools to compose music, the result of lengthy and specialized education, so they created their own musical compositions with and within their writing. This constitutes a way in which the New Woman writers used music subversively, illustrating—for those who were looking in the right places—that women *could* compose whatever they liked. And not only were Grand and Egerton experimenting, in true fin-de-siècle fashion, with literary form, they were creating an innovative compositional style. The language, the written words, are but part of the author’s overall creation. These women pushed beyond the limits of their art, making an important but overlooked contribution to what Steven Paul Scher calls “the diverse manifestations and interpretive intricacies of word-music convergence” (“Revisited” 11).

<3> I have noted with great interest the overlaps in vocabulary that occur, words that apply to both literary and musical study and composition – opus, morceau, counterpoint, theme, even the word composition itself. I am far from alone in my attention to the similarities between the “sister arts,” although the organization and acknowledgement of this tradition is a fairly recent phenomenon. In his 1970 essay “Notes Toward a Theory of Verbal Music,” Scher wrote, “Aesthetic speculation about the interrelationship between literature and music has been regarded as a fascinating and elusive, if somewhat suspect, border area of literary criticism” (“Notes” 23). Scher’s work, and that of his fellow Word and Music critics, began to slowly unpeel the elusive and suspect layers surrounding this area. In fact, Scher offered a theoretical framework for the study of music and literature, creating definitions and a vocabulary to be used for critical evaluation. He outlined three broadly-defined categories of musico-literary relations: music in literature, music and literature, and literature in music (“Revisited” 18). This article will deal primarily with the first category. Additionally, Scher defines “verbal music” as

“any literary presentation (whether in poetry or prose) of existing or fictitious musical compositions: any poetic texture which has a piece of music as its ‘theme’” (“Notes” 25). This will be an important factor in the later discussion of Egerton and Grand. The narrower category of “word music,” Scher writes, is “exclusively an attempt at literary imitation of sound” (“Notes” 26). Scher identifies two fundamental modes of rendering music in words:

Either the author *represents* music which he identifies or which is otherwise identifiable as an existing *opus*, or he constructs a ‘verbal piece of music’ to which no composition corresponds. In the first case the poet is usually prompted and assisted by his own direct experience of the music to be represented, while in the second it is his imagination alone that evokes the literary ‘semblance’ of a score. (“Mann” 1)

Both these methods of blending word and music will be central in analyzing Grand and Egerton. Scher’s definitions of verbal music, and the theoretical framework he created, will provide the basis for my critical evaluation of musical composition in New Woman fiction.

<4> Despite the tradition—however limited—of musico-literary criticism, and despite Scher’s own work, it wasn’t until 1989 that the study was given a name: melopoetics, or melopoesis. There was talk of the “symphonic novel” (Freedman 1), the “lyrical novel,” and the “musical novel” (Freedman 11), but before melopoesis, none caught on. Melopoesis is the relation of music to literature; melopoetics is situated at “the interface of musical and literary study” (Scher “Revisited” 13). Named by Lawrence Kramer in his essay “Dangerous Liaisons,” the term has not been met with universal approval (see Wolf “Intermediality” 39), but I am inclined to side with Scher when he calls the term “felicitous” (“Preface” xiv). Representing a comparative discipline that is neither music nor literature but both, the term “melopoesis” perfectly encapsulates my point about blended composition. As such, I will hereafter refer to this style of composition as “melopoetic composition.”

<5> Melopoetic composition is not limited to one form imitating the other. It is more than applying musical nomenclature to literature; it is literary-musical synesthesia. It is both sensory inputs happening at once. Just as melopoesis is when music and literature converge, so melopoetic composition is the uniting of literary and musical composition. This type of composition, though discussed previously, has not been identified by one term. My aim is to work toward a definition of the chosen term and to show how New Woman writers were experimenting with melopoetic composition in prose decades before Joyce’s sirens sang their song.

<6> Though melopoetic composition can be much more complex than, for example, a novel’s form imitating that of a traditional musical compositional structure, it is worth noting some standard musical forms. The symphony, for example, is usually a lengthy four-movement piece,

made up of an initial opening sonata, an adagio (slow) movement, a scherzo (fast and playful) movement, and a final allegro (fast and joyous). The fugue contains an exposition, a development, and a recapitulation, and has at least two, usually three, main “voices” that carry the theme and variations throughout simultaneously. The sonata is similar, though more often designed for one main voice, but is also marked by an exposition, development, and recapitulation of the theme. Each section contains several successive themes and textures (Hepokoski and Darcy 16). Universal amongst these musical forms, then, is the tripartite progression, starting with the exposition, which “begins with a *primary theme or primary idea* . . . in the tonic that sets the emotional tone of the whole work” (Hepokoski and Darcy 18). The development then takes over, and “initiates more active, restless, or frequent tonal shifts—a sense of comparative tonal instability. Here one gets the impression of a series of changing, coloristic moods or tonal adventures, often led (in major-mode works) through the submediant key, vi, or other minor-mode keys with shadowed, melancholy, or anxious connotations” (Hepokoski and Darcy 18-19). The recapitulation re-introduces the theme, removes the anxiety, and “finally resolves the work” (Hepokoski and Darcy 18). Contrapuntal form, or counterpoint, is a second melody that harmonizes with the main melody. Marshall Brown writes that the musical “nineteenth-century norm” includes pieces which “oscillate between stability or resolution and excitement or expressivity, and, in particular, pieces [which] begin in normality (in the tonic key) and move through areas of greater or lesser tension in the middle until they arrive at a concluding resolution” (80). Brown links this musical form to nineteenth-century fiction, writing that it is “likewise defined by oppositions between tension and relaxation, complication and resolution, colorful dissonance and restored harmony” (80). Using musical language to describe the literature, Brown writes that the nineteenth-century author must accommodate both “the true and the interesting or—to borrow the musical terms—both the consonance and dissonance, tonic and dominant” (80). The connection between the terms and forms listed in the preceding paragraph and literature should, at its most basic level, already be clear: theme and counterpoint as plot and subplot, or two main characters; chapters as movements; exposition, development, and recapitulation as the traditional narrative arc of fiction; more specifically, Grand and Egerton both juxtapose dreamy women (consonance) against stormy men (dissonance); and so on. Progressing in a linear manner, much like the nineteenth-century novel, these musical forms share many of the characteristics of literary style, similarities which will be explored here in the melopoetic composition of Grand and Egerton.

<7> It is worth noting Jennifer Stolpa’s call for scholars of Grand to analyze *The Heavenly Twins*’ “interdisciplinary approach to creativity in musical and narrative composition,” in particular her point that Grand’s “experimentation with narrative styles makes her concern with musicians’ creativity and formal style more significant” (157-158). It is also worth remembering that Grand pursued musical composition, but was discouraged from it, and that she was acutely

aware of women's education inhibiting the development of musical genius. Grand's biographer Gillian Kersley writes that "at the age of eleven [Grand] composed some songs and sent them surreptitiously to a publisher. They were returned—her first rejection—and fell into her mother's hands. The ensuing scene . . . became a lasting, galling memory" (23). Perhaps Grand's stunted desire to compose music, cut off at the stalk but leaving the roots, awoke from its dormancy when she began composing her novels. *The Heavenly Twins* is infused with music: it is in its form, its content, its style, in myriad overt and covert ways. Grand did not simply engage her feminine abilities in the process of re-creating music or literature—she created both.

<8> The first area of interest in exploring Grand's melopoetic composition is also perhaps the most basic: form. Grand's novels correspond with many aspects of musical structure. Brown writes that the language of nineteenth-century music is one of contrast—

Consonance with dissonance, tonic with dominant (or other non-tonic) harmonies, symmetrical with asymmetrical phrasing, melodic outline with rhythmic configuration, treble with bass, strong with weak beats, solo with accompaniment, string with wind sonorities. But all have in common that one term is the normal, neutral, stable, or principal one, while the other is abnormal, expressive, unstable, or subordinate. (79)

This tension, this division, is certainly evident in Grand's novels. Perhaps most present is the over-arching tension between oppressive patriarchy and put-upon women—this theme underpins most of Grand's work. The main, tonic melody in Grand's texts is always that of a woman, paired with varying levels of tension between accompanying melodies. Given that in musical terminology the "dominant" is actually secondary to the tonic, there is interesting semantic play at work: what is the societal dominant in the literary narrative (men) is also the musical dominant in the melopoetic narrative (male characters), but the latter definition makes the dominant subordinate to the tonic (female characters). When the female in the pair becomes unstable (Evadne, Edith), she becomes the dominant; though in musical terms this is secondary, her melody still carries the story, thus becoming both tonic and dominant at once (or at alternating times). Male and female characters occupy both tonic and dominant spaces in the narratives, but the male tonics merely echo the melody of a former (now unstable) female tonic; thus, in Grand's musical world, the women are dominant—in the non-musical sense. Edith Beale is a tonic note, Moseley Menteith is a dominant; Evadne provides consonance, while Colquhoun provides dissonance; and indeed, when both of these relationships shift and the woman becomes unstable, it inverts the pairing—the woman becomes dominant in the musical sense, but her original melody remains the tonic. By making woman the main melody and man the secondary, Grand flips the traditional hierarchy: the woman becomes "principle," the male figure becomes "subordinate."

<9> Grand's novels also correspond with musical form(s). *The Heavenly Twins* contains a contrapuntal structure, with the three main melodies—those of Evadne, Angelica, and Edith—playing simultaneously in harmony, retaining each storyline's independence but fitting together into one larger piece. Similarly, it could be argued that *The Heavenly Twins* also follows a fugal structure. Again, the three main melodies, in the form of the triad of heroines, interact throughout the piece and progress together through the storyline's exposition, development, and recapitulation. The exposition is generally light-hearted, introducing each character and their own melody: Angelica the playful; Evadne the serious; Edith the sweet. Then the development begins, with its anxiety and sometimes frenzied activity: Angelica struggles under the pressures of Victorian femininity; Evadne discovers her husband's questionable past and abandons him; Edith marries, contracts syphilis, goes mad, and dies. In the recapitulation, perhaps the final Book of the novel, narrated by Dr. Galbraith, we go back to the theme of Evadne, but in a different voice, with references to both Angelica and Edith woven into the narrative/melody. Though the tension still exists, and not all have met a happy end, most of the problems are resolved, and the activity and cacophony of the development is settled into one main melody. The composition starts with Evadne's theme, and it ends with Evadne's theme.

<10> *The Heavenly Twins* is, interestingly, divided not just into chapters, but also into Books. There are six of them: "Childhoods and Girlhoods," "A Maltese Miscellany, Development and Arrest of Development," "The Tenor and the Boy.—An Interlude," "Mrs. Kilroy of Ilverthorpe," and "The Impressions of Dr. Galbraith." Each book functions like a movement of a musical piece: they all include the basic tonic melody, but in different physical/musical settings, with variations on the main theme. Grand even uses musical terminology in naming the books: the third is called "Development and Arrest of Development," and indeed contains the piece's most dramatic and anxious moments as the melody line(s) develop—Edith marries and deteriorates; Angelica proposes to Mr. Kilroy; Evadne promises to eschew participation in political activity. The musical and narrative development is literally arrested, however, and in its place comes an "Interlude," which, in a musical setting, means a short break from the main theme, a shift in focus, often used as a transition back to the tonic or into the recapitulation. In a pop song, for instance, this would be called the "bridge." Grand's "Interlude" functions in exactly the same way as a musical interlude might: it changes the subject—suddenly, the tone shifts, the main characters fade into the background, and the activity centers around characters named "The Tenor" and "The Boy"—and then transitions back into the original theme when the Boy is revealed to be Angelica in disguise. This is followed with a return to Angelica's theme, in Book V: "Mrs. Kilroy of Ilverthorpe," another variation on the now-married Angelica's melody, after which the swell slowly decrescendos into the final book, Dr. Galbraith's solo recapitulation of the previous themes.

<11> However, to limit the discussion of Grand’s version of, and contribution to, melopoetic composition to mere imitation of musical form oversimplifies the complex interactions between music and literature in her work. One such interaction, unique amongst Grand’s oeuvre, appears in *The Heavenly Twins*: that of the musical notation included in the text. The cathedral chime’s musical notation is the first line of the novel, and appears eleven more times throughout the text—a rare stylistic move, especially for Grand’s time (though George Moore used a music score in *The Untilled Field* [see Pierse 11] and also in *Celibate Lives*). Using the musical text with the linguistic text provides an interesting and unusual blending of the two notational forms, constituting a textual/notational element of melopoetic composition. Scholarship exists on musical notation in Modernist writing—Pound’s *The Cantos* (1915-1962), Joyce’s *Finnegan’s Wake* (1939), and Samuel Beckett’s *Watt* (1945)—but musical notation in their predecessor, Sarah Grand, has been overlooked. Grand’s chosen notation, a line from Mendelssohn’s 1846 oratorio “Elijah,” appears thus:



The extract is written in D Major, with the “p” for “piano” denoting the soft dynamic for the line, in cut time – a very traditional piece, with nothing unusual or offensive. The lyrics, given under the notation, read “He, watching over Israel, slumbers not, nor sleeps.” In the notation’s first appearance, the author and title of the piece are given; in subsequent appearances this information is left out, as though the text absorbs the music into itself, erasing its individual identity.

<12> The chime’s notation first appears, appropriately, first: after the title, it is the first thing we see, the first text we read, the first line of the novel. This music is the opening line of the novel’s prefatory section, the “Proem.” The proem sets up and introduces the novel, so the notation’s position at the head of this section, indeed of the novel as a whole, denotes its importance in the overall fabric of the piece. This music sets the scene. Then the first verbal line is a description of the chime, transitioning smoothly from a musical illustration of the chime to a linguistic one: “From the high Cathedral tower the solemn assurance floated forth to be a warning, or a promise, according to the mental state of those whose ears it filled; and the mind, familiar with the phrase, continued it involuntarily, carrying the running accompaniment, as well as the words and the melody, on to the end” (*HT* xxxix). This functions as both a narration and the outlining of an expectation for the reader: carry this melody on to the end of the novel. Grand emphasizes the chime’s constancy, running throughout the novel as a soundtrack to the story. It rang out “by day and night,” on the hour, every hour (*HT* xxxix). Not only does Grand emphasize its regular presence, she outlines both its almost supernatural ability to

permeate every inch of the narrative space and its ability to extend over a large geographic space: “The four winds of heaven by day and night spread it abroad over the great wicked city, and over the fair flat country, by many a tiny township and peaceful farmstead and scattered hamlet, on, on, it was said, to the sea—to the sea, which was twenty miles away!” (*HT* xxix). The chime is not just a melody, Grand tells us, it is part of the people, of the town—and of the composition. As if the notation’s placement and the proem’s focus on the chime wasn’t enough to indicate its importance, Grand points the reader directly to the chime as “worth a thought,” writing that “everything in the world that is worth a thought becomes food for controversy sooner or later, and the chime was no exception to the rule. Differences of opinion regarding it had always been numerous and extreme, and it was amusing to listen to the wordy warfare which was continually being waged upon the subject” (*HT* xl). The reader, then, is not only primed to pay close attention to the chime, but is also introduced to the chime as the main melody, with a chorus of voices surrounding and supporting it (out of which, perhaps, emerge the main harmonies of Evadne, Angelica, and Edith).

<13> The proem discusses the chime at length; indeed, the first six pages are devoted to the chime and its varying effects on the people who hear it. The notation appears a second time on page xliii, the fifth page of the proem, amongst this discussion, and also as part of the text rather than a separate entity. It is not announced, or paused for, it simply falls in between two paragraphs about the chime—Grand’s melopoetic compositional notation is now in full swing. The chime then introduces the reader to the first characters, a young collier and an old sailor. Its music floats over the land to a barge on a river, on which the young collier rides, “filling the air with music, but coming from no one could tell whence” (*HT* xlv). Like the earlier notation as part of the narrative, here the linguistic description presents the chime as part of the land, and the story. Grand again prepares the reader to carry the chime throughout the novel: “Change followed change, but the chime was immutable. And always, whatever came, it rang out calmly over the beautiful old city of Morningquest, and entered into it, and was part of the life of it, mixing itself impartially with the good and evil” (*HT* xlvi). Just as the chime weaves its way through the life of the city, so it weaves its way through the entire text. Throughout the proem, Grand goes to great lengths to ensure that the readers remember the chime as they progress through the novel, and the final lines of the proem even imply that the chime plays some role in each character’s fate, thus not only becoming part of the narrative, but somehow directing it: regarding the chime, Grand writes, some people “believed that for everyone a special hour would come, when they would be called, and then left to decide, as it were, between life and death-in-life; if they accepted life, the next message would be fraught with strength and help and blessing; but if they rejected it, the bells would utter their condemnation, and leave them to their fate” (*HT* xlvii). So the chime introduces the novel, frames the narrative, and appears throughout the text both in notation and in melopoetic discourse—truly, this is melopoetic composition.

<14> Following the proem, the chime notation's next appearance again mimics its role in the novel. It finds Mrs. Orton Beg alone. She hears the clock begin to strike, and "raises her head to listen . . . The chime rolled out over the storm-stained city: [chime notation] Mechanically Mrs. Orton Beg repeated the phrase with each note as it floated forth, filling the silent spaces" (HT71). Much like Mrs. Orton Beg, the reader is again directed to keep the phrase in the background, where it maintains a steady presence, occasionally floating forth and filling the "silent spaces" of the text between notations. The notation also takes on a life of its own at times, functioning almost as a character and as dialogue. In the notation's fourth appearance, it interrupts Evadne just as she prepares to answer Mrs. Orton Beg's question about her marital state.

The cathedral clock began to strike . . . It seemed to be listening, to be waiting, and Evadne waited and listened too, raising her head. There was a perceptible, momentary pause, then came the chime, full, round, mournful, melodious, yet glad too, in the strength of its solemn assurance, filling the desolate regions of sorrow and silence with something of hope whereon the weary mind might repose: [chime notation] When the last reverberation of the last note had melted out of hearing, Evadne sighed; then she straightened herself, as if collecting her energy, and began to speak. (HT 76)

Here, the chime appears as a third character, in conversation with Evadne and her aunt. It silences Evadne, whose victimization at the hands of Victorian society has begun in earnest; the lyrics, the constant "He, watching" the fleeing Evadne, takes on sinister undertones, like a patriarchal watchdog. Neither character hears nor reads the lyrics, of course, only the reader does, but the words are so attached to the notes that the sound creates both word and music at once, regardless of its word-less presentation. In the notation's fifth appearance, it is worth noting, the chime again interrupts a conversation, but comes as a comfort to a decidedly non-victimized character: the Duke of Morningquest, who "took off his little round black velvet cap, and leant forward, listening intently . . . It was the habit of the old duke to listen for it hour by hour" (HT 147). The notation takes on a life of its own, changing shape depending on the interpretation of the listener, but providing a constant rhythm in the text, melting into the linguistic narrative.

<15> The chime becomes part of the narrative once again, this time accompanied by Edith's melody. Poor Edith, whose fate is by now sealed, has returned home with her syphilitic child. Her mother inquires about the arrival of Edith's husband, and as Edith answers, the chime rings. Edith frowns, and remarks that she wishes "those bells could be stopped" and that they "deafen" her (HT 285). Edith, dominated, ruined, and eventually killed by a system which serves her up to a diseased husband (who escapes largely unscathed, other than suffering the impact of having a Bible thrown at his head by Angelica), is deafened by the message of being

watched by “Him.” Then, the notation’s sixth appearance commences. Part of a larger group, Dr. Galbraith observes Edith and silently diagnoses her disease. The notation and the chime again become part of the dialogue:

The chime rolled through the room, a deafening volume of sound, in long reverberations, from amidst which the constant message disentangled itself as it were, but distinctly, although to each listener with a different effect: [chime notation] It awoke Dr. Galbraith from a train of painful reflections; it reassured the bishop; and it made Angelica fret for Diavolo remorsefully. (*HT* 293)

The chime interacts with each character differently, representing either “a warning, or a promise” (*HT* xxxix). The colon preceding the notation is an interesting choice—it is not a full stop, then the notation, but rather a punctuation mark which indicates continuation of an idea. This reinforces the intricate link between the musical and linguistic notation: they are of the same thought, part of the same composition.

<16> The “Interlude” contains the next four of the chime’s notations. As such, the notation is the one textual element that is constant between the main movements and the interlude. This Book is very different from the others, but its alternate melody is punctuated by brief appearances of the main theme. It appears on page 371, “voicelike, clear, and resonant,” becoming part of both the Tenor’s internal terrain and the external setting in which he sits. In its next appearance, the notation occurs as part of the dialogue between the Tenor and the Boy, inspiring further discussion as it prompts the Boy to ask, “Do you believe it?” (*HT* 376), meaning, does the Tenor believe that there is a “He” watching out for them at all times. Naturally, the Boy—a transgressive Angelica in masculine disguise—hates the chime. The Tenor, however, loves it, and it is cited as having brought him to Morningquest, and thus to his fate: in the chime’s ninth notation, the Tenor hears it on the seashore in Cornwall, where he sits in despair, and considers it a call to return to Morningquest. The chime, displaying melopoetic agency, leads the Tenor to his current life. The chime’s tenth notation, and the final notation in the Interlude, again finds the Tenor and the Boy together, and blends with their voices. Their singing “in turn quivered into silence, and all was still—only for a moment, though, for the clocks had struck unheeded, and now the chime rang out through the sultry air, voice-like, clear, and resonant: [chime notation]” (*HT* 441). The entire passage is a description of music, but the notational style shifts from words to notes with hardly a pause. Twice it is described as “voice-like, clear, and resonant” (*HT* 371, 441), emphasizing its role in the narrative not just as a simple chime but rather as musical dialogue.

<17> Just as the chime guided the Tenor to his life in Morningquest, so it accompanies him to his death. In its penultimate appearance, the notation is placed alongside a sick and dying Tenor: “It was all ‘His Will’ to the Tenor, and for his sake there was nothing he would not have

borne heroically. [chime notation] His cough was much worse that day, the pain in his chest was more acute, and his temperature rose higher and higher, yet he did not complain" (HT 503). Interestingly, the chime here is not even mentioned, as it usually is when the notation appears; now it is just part of the text, part of the fabric of the narrative. The Tenor hears the chime as he dies, and his death is marked by the phrase "and now [the chime] never ceased for him" (HT510). The chime ceases for the reader, however—in its printed musical form, anyway—shortly after, when it meets Angelica and her grandfather the duke in its final notation (HT 534). Though the duke does not see or hear the words, he repeats them, as, by now, can the reader.

<18> By the end of the novel, the chime shifts from verbal music and becomes a form of word music. The reader hears the music even when the notation is not present, as is frequently the case. The chime is mentioned regularly throughout the novel, not just when the notation appears, but the combined effect is one in which the reader retains knowledge of the notation and thus understands linguistic descriptions of the chime in a musical context.⁽⁴⁾ Word music—"an attempt at literary imitation of sound"—appears elsewhere in the novel, too, adding layers to the melopoetic nature of Grand's composition. In the "Interlude," Grand describes the Tenor's singing in great detail, so much that it resonates in the reader's mind as singing, not as narrative: "The first note he uttered was a long *crescendo* of such rich volume and so sweet, that the people held their breath and looked up . . . It was as if a delicious spell had been cast upon the congregation, which held them bound until the last note of the exquisite voice, even the last reverberation of the organ accompaniment, had trembled into silence" (HT 360). The singing, along with the organ, is to be imagined by the reader. The stark silence after reinforces the earlier sound, both in the narrative and in the reader's imagination. Adding to the melopoetic nature of the scene, the singer is referred to not by his name but as "The Tenor," thus blending musical score and fictional narrative.

<19> Angelica's violin playing is described as word music, too. In the "Interlude," as the Boy, Angelica plays for the tenor: "[The Boy] drew a long melodious wail from the instrument, then lightly ran up the chromatic scale and paused on an upper note for an instant before he began, with perfect certainty of idea and marvellous modulations and transitions in the expression of it, to make music that steeped the Tenor's whole being in bliss" (HT 403). Grand does not just say "The Boy played violin," but rather describes the sound of it, the notes he played, the effect it has, all in melopoetic terms. The reader hears both the words and the music. Similarly, Grand creates word music with Angelica's bad playing as well. When trying to drive her husband away from the house, Angelica picks up her violin:

She made it scream; she made it wail; she set her own teeth on edge with the horrid discords she drew from it. It crowed like a cock twenty-five times running, with an

interval of half a minute between each crow. It brayed like two asses on a common, one answering the other from a considerable distance. And then it became ten cats quarreling *crescendo*, with a pause after every violent outburst, broken at well-judged intervals by an occasional howl. (*HT* 472)

This time, Grand assigns not only a dynamic action to the piece—a *crescendo*—but also gives a description of the specific sounds and the timing of Angelica’s playing. It may not be beautiful music, but the words certainly evoke sounds. Thus, throughout *The Heavenly Twins* music permeates multiple layers of the text, creating a melopoetic composition that is both music and literature. In its final pages, with Dr. Galbraith taking up the melody line, the narrative describes a lark “singing somewhere out of sight—Die Lerche, die im augen nicht, / Doch immer in den ohren ist—and the ripples of undecipherable sound struck some equally inarticulate chord of sense” (*HT* 613). The musical language used speaks for itself. The lark here can stand as a metaphor for the chime’s notation, and for music in the text: we might not always be able to see it, but Grand’s weaving together of the two compositional media ensures that it is always in our ears.

<20> If Grand ends her text with a grand finale, Egerton begins hers with a great crash. Charlotte Purkis writes that “George Egerton’s *Keynotes* (1893) . . . downplayed plot, invoking music as a metaphor for exploring the motivations of women characters in a series of moments” (200). As is usual with references to music in New Woman fiction, this is a mere side note (or, more specifically, a footnote) in a separate discussion. It is, however, an interesting one, and hints at what I will argue here: that Egerton ignored the conventions of fiction and turned to musical conventions instead, creating melopoetic compositions in which the music informs the fiction. Like Grand, her short story collections can be seen as imitating traditional musical forms. Her collections are given musical names, and they are divided into short stories, much like the movements of a symphony. Again, however, this is but the most basic element of Egerton’s melopoetic composition, which in many ways is even more complex—and much more “modernist”—than Grand’s. Egerton also uses musical notation in her work, assigning a particular chord to certain stories—“A Psychological Moment” begins with a dissonant chord, in fortissimo; Part II of “The Regeneration of Two” begins with a G minor chord, in pianissimo. This is a fascinating move on Egerton’s part—why those stories? why those chords? why those dynamics?—and one which is very unusual, if not unique, for the time. Egerton’s narrative style is a seamless and thorough blend with musical composition—her characters are frequently unnamed and time and plot are unusually fluid, moving the stories away from traditional nineteenth-century literary form, and the narratives often contain descriptive musical scenes, from bird song to guitar strumming to supernatural piano playing. It is as though Egerton’s compositions *are* music, but written in words rather than musical notation.

<21> When looking for evidence of melopoetic composition in Egerton's work, the logical starting point would be the titles of the works themselves. All are melopoetic terms, appropriate in both literary and musical discourse. A keynote is the principal idea in a piece of literature; a keynote in music, otherwise known as the tonic, is the root of the key signature, the first note in the chosen scale (so if a piece was in G major, the keynote would be G). Discord indicates both a lack of agreement (or harmony?) and dissonant musical sound, harsh and jarring. Similarly, though the written word "discord" does not include the letter "h," as in "chord," it is homonymic when spoken, and certainly evokes musical chords which are discordant. The word symphony is less literary and more musical—the melopoetic element comes in when one considers that the symphony in question is not a complex musical piece of multiple movements, but rather a complex fictional piece of multiple stories; assigning it the name "symphony" serves to shift the composition from the purely literary to the melopoetic. Similarly, a fantasia is usually a musical composition in free or irregular form—by labeling her work *Fantasias*, Egerton asks the reader to consider it in a musical context. That Egerton's publications are called *Keynotes*, *Discords*, *Symphonies*, and *Fantasias*, plural (rather than *Keynote*, *Discord*, etc.), emphasizes the plurality of the words: the collection contains multiple keynotes, multiple discords, multiple symphonies, multiple fantasias, and perhaps multiple uses of the terms—musical and literary. Within these collections are individual stories, or movements, and these too contain melopoetic titles: for example, *Symphonies* contains "A Nocturne," typically considered a musical composition which evokes the night (made famous by Chopin's nocturnes), and *Fantasias* features a story called "The Elusive Melody," which is fitting—it is Egerton's somewhat elusive melopoetic melody which I seek in this analysis.

<22> Like Grand, Egerton employs the use of musical notation in literary text. While the effect of creating an overarching musical theme throughout the text is shared between the two authors, Egerton's use of musical notation differs significantly from Grand's. Rather than using a recognized piece of text multiple times, Egerton assigns two of her stories in *Discords*—the first and the last—their own key signature and relevant chord. The first of these appears, like in *The Heavenly Twins*, before the literary text, and in this case even before the title. The page's content is ordered thus: chord, title ("A Psychological Moment at Three Periods"), subtitle ("I. The Child"), text. The chosen chord is in the key of G minor, and has G as its keynote:



The minor key signature creates a feeling of sadness or gloom, or perhaps foreboding. In the bass clef, the chord is a standard G octave tonic root. But in the treble clef, things are not so straightforward. The notation contains two accidentals, F sharp and G sharp, the semi-tonal neighbors to either side of the tonic G. So, when played, there is a standard G minor chord—the G in the bass clef, then the two B flats (top and bottom note) and one D in the treble clef—but then also an F sharp and a G sharp, effectively playing three semi-tones at once (F#, G, and G#). This is an incredibly discordant sound, designed intentionally by Egerton to be so. The chord is especially jarring when the dynamic is taken into account: it is written as fortissimo, or very loud. The chord, then is loud, dissonant, clashing; it creates anxiety, tension, a startling or perhaps even frightening cacophony of sound. It almost looks like an attempt to play a G minor chord, marred by interference: when played on a piano, it is as though someone or something smashed the player's right hand to the keyboard, hitting three adjacent keys at once. The entire chord evokes a lack of harmony from its sound to its actual notation, as the accidentals are marked as F sharp and G sharp rather than G flat and A flat, which would be more consistent with the two-flat key signature. Similarly, though the key signature is 4/4, there are only three beats in this measure: two of the chord, and one of rest. It does not follow its own form. The overall effect is one of harsh discord, and that is how the story—and the collection—begins.

<23> Egerton's *Symphony in G Minor*, then, begins much as orchestral pieces do, with scene-setting background: "The lamp on the nursery table is yet unlit, and the waning daylight of the early spring throws the part of the room near the window into cold grey shadow" (D 1). In keeping with its key signature, the story has a melancholy beginning. There is a quarrel (D 1), a coffin (D 2), a dreaded door (D 3); everything is dark and dreary and sad. No names are given, other than naming an accent as that of a Dubliner. A young child is ridiculed by her friends. The story progresses to part two, "The Girl," and part three, "The Woman." The story continues its fitting dissonance: a young girl observes the horrific abuse of a disabled boy in a circus; a young woman is blackmailed into becoming a man's mistress, then is discarded. In the final lines, however, the mood lifts. The woman in question finds hope in the night sky: "She wraps herself in a shawl and sits watching. One great star blinks down at her like a bright glad eye, and hers shine steadily back with the somber light of an undaunted spirit waiting quietly for the dawn to break, to take the first step of her new life's journey" (D 66). The discord is (momentarily) resolved. Perhaps the accidentals are taken out of the chord, thus changing it to a standard G minor—very beautiful and pleasant in its minor way—or perhaps even modulating it without notation to a G major. Whatever the overtone, the end is decidedly hopeful, in discord with the discord.

<24> The second and last appearance of musical notation comes at the end of *Discords*, again prefacing the final section of the collection at the start of “The Regeneration of Two,” part two. This time, the chord is free of accidentals, and is marked pianissimo, or very soft:



In contrast to the earlier chord’s violent noise and harsh sound, this chord is quiet, gentle, minor, a standard G minor chord. It is interesting that while both chords are notated as half notes in 4/4 time, the second has two beats of rest before the end: the chord plays quietly, and the song ends with silence of equal length. The measure has the appropriate number of beats, and all is in order. The literary text begins:

Snow everywhere! A white world wrapped in a snowy shroud, under a grey-white sky . . .
. A twig crackling in the wood, the brittle snap of a branch under its weight of snow, the rattling rush of icicles as it crashes to the ground, the hoarse startled call of capercailzie; every sound is as crisply distinct in the clear stillness, as a sibilant whisper in a hushed room. (*D* 202)

Everything is clean and crisp, a fresh fall of snow to match the freshly-unburdened chord. The chord opens the section, but in the rest the sound of the world takes over the melody. And indeed, the sound of the story seems to take over the chord in the final lines: “And outside the snow falls softly and the darkness gathers, but inside the music of women’s voices singing at their work and the patter of children’s feet and cooing laughter fill the house in which love is making a carnival of roses” (*D* 253). The snow, like the G minor key signature, remains constant, and the threat of dissonance lurks in the gathering darkness, but the happy song within has drowned out the minor chord. Egerton’s minor composition ends with a major flourish.

<25> Certainly the G minor key and chord were deliberately chosen by Egerton. The theme of the collection is almost entirely made up of stories containing tragic women whom society forces into unhappy situations, then blames and shuns them for some aspect which, Egerton implies, is beyond their control: a woman disgraced for sexual impropriety which she did not agree to, another humiliated by using alcohol as a coping mechanism for her disastrous fate. There are unwanted pregnancies, a forced infanticide, and repeated scenes of what we would now call rape and domestic violence. What these women have in common is their shared victimization at the hands of men and society, who provide the discord. So perhaps G

minor, with its sad beauty, is a musical metaphor for women's lives. For Egerton, women existed in a minor key—but the potential for beauty never left them.

<26> While musical notation only appears twice in Egerton's compositions, she creates word music throughout all four collections treated here. *Keynotes* begins with "A Cross Line," which in turn begins with word music:

The rather flat notes of a man's voice float out into the clear air, singing the refrain of a popular music-hall ditty. There is something incongruous between the melody and the surroundings. It seems profane, indelicate, to bring this slangy, vulgar tune, and with it the mental picture of footlight flare and fantastic dance, into the lovely freshness of this perfect spring day. (K 1)

The first thing the reader hears is music, sort of dissonant music which clashes with the environment (a theme which, perhaps, Egerton expanded upon in her subsequent publication). After introducing "the singer" and the young woman on whom the story will focus, or the two main melodies, the orchestra creates the musical setting: "a little river rushes along in haste to join a greater sister that is fighting a troubled way to the sea . . . The tails of several ducks can be seen above the water, and the paddle of their balancing feet, and the gurgling suction of their bills as they search for larva can be heard distinctly between the hum of insect, twitter of bird, and rustle of stream and leaf" (K 2-3). These "instruments" provide the background to the melody, which is always a duet either shared between the woman and the singer or the woman and her husband. There is the occasional burst of melody, as the husband "whistles softly and all out of tune" (K 8) while in the setting there sounds the screech of a hen (K 9) and the buzzing of a bee (K 10). Nature provides constant music, and Egerton carefully describes its orchestra in detail: "through the myriad indefinite sounds comes the regular scrape of a strickle on the scythe of a reaper in a neighbouring meadow" (K 18), providing the rhythm section. Then, "she fancies herself in Arabia," and "Her thoughts shape themselves into a wild song, a song to her steed of flowing man and satin skin; an uncouth rhythmical jingle with a feverish beat" (K 19). The reader is provided with more of an auditory experience than visual: it is this wild Arabian song which one imagines while one reads.

<27> The soundscape of *Keynotes* continues to be extraordinarily vivid: as "A Cross Line" winds down, "there is a long silence, the sun is waning and the scythes are silent, and overhead the crows are circling, a croaking irregular army, homeward bound from a long day's pillage" (K29). This again constitutes a dissonant sound in the orchestra. Egerton even assigns a tone (or perhaps an instrument) to certain sounds, as "a bee buzzes in and fills the room with his bass note" (K 31). The rhythm section is highlighted, as she "hears the sharp thrust of his spade above the bee's hum, leaf rustle, and the myriad late summer sounds that thrill through the air"

(K 32). Again, this description is more vividly aural than visual. This continues throughout *Keynotes*, with guitars twanging merrily and tambourines rattling (K 146), and even the absence of noise is mentioned: in “The Spell of the White Elf,” for example, the narrator observes the setting’s orchestration: “There is no sound but a lapping wash of water at the side of the steamer . . . I cannot make out why there is such a silence” (K 76). In the space of noise, there is silence—but the soundtrack is always mentioned, all the way to the closing lines of *Keynotes*: “And the night breeze sings sadly to the thrumming of unseen harps, and soothes her troubled spirit with tender whisperings that only the stricken in soul can catch in snatches from the spirit of nature” (K 184). This musical language of singing and harps creates a word music background as *Keynotes* sends.

<28> Word music is similarly evoked in *Discords*, and often to cue a changing setting: in part two of “A Psychological Moment at Three Periods,” a rural Dutch setting is musicalized by the “tink, tink, tink” of the bell-cow (D 10). Later, in “Gone Under,” the arrival in London’s harbor is heralded by “the sound of bells . . . the blast of foghorns, and the shriek of whistles, and the rumbling hum of the city” which “mingle in a great symphony” (D 106). The livestock below begin to “low deeply” (D 106). In “The Regeneration of Two,” the rural setting is again a type of bell: the jingle bells on Fruen’s sleigh (D 236-237). The interiority of the Fruen in question is described in distinctly musical language: “She has found fresh interests, new duties, an ambition, and . . . no love will ever satisfy her wholly; it will never be more than one note; true, a grand note, in the harmony of union; but not the harmony” (D 246). Love provides “one note” in Egerton’s discordant symphony. In what turned out to be a keynote in *Keynotes*, Egerton wrote the following: “Nature has ever a discordant note in its symphony” (K 140). It is clear that music and discord are a constant theme of Egerton’s. Like the repertoire of a musical composer, Egerton’s compositions each have their own flavor, their own tone, their own subject matter, and, in the case of *Discords*, their own key signature.

<29> A more overt manifestation of melopoetic composition, but one which includes a fascinating space for author/reader co-composition, is that of musical compositions that appear within literary composition. Grand writes songs within her novels, most notably the heavenly twins’ humorous parodies, and Egerton often references specific songs and their lyrics in her texts. The melodies are not specifically stated, thus creating a sort of reader-based musical composition within the literary work—readers create a melody for the songs in their head as they read the lyrics. This is Scher’s verbal music (“any literary presentation of existing or fictitious musical compositions”) at its best, and adds yet another layer to New Woman fiction’s melopoesis.

<30> Examples of this verbal music occur early in Grand’s tome, with the twins Angelica and

Diavolo providing both comic relief and evidence of a woman's musical compositional abilities. The twins argue over blocked light while painting; the scuffle is resolved when Angelica declares, "Let's make it into a song" (HT 29). She then sings: "No light have we, and that we do resent, / And, learning, this the weather will relent, / Repent! Relent! Ah-men," Angelica sang. Diavolo paused with his brush halfway to his mouth, and nodded intelligently. 'Now!' said Angelica, and they repeated the parody together, Angelica making a perfect second to Diavolo's exquisite treble" (HT 30). The lyrics to the improvised song are set apart from the text, indented and slightly smaller than their surrounding narrative, marking a decided change in reading style: we were reading a narrative, and now we are reading a song. The melody is composed by the reader, twice—first with Angelica's solo, then with Diavolo's harmony, in "exquisite treble," or a higher register. A similar scene occurs when the twins sing "an anthem" for Evadne, presumably of their own creation:

"Papa—Papa—Papa," —they sang—"Papa says—that we—that we—that we are little devils! And so we are—we are—we are and ever shall be—world without end." "I am a chip," Diavolo trilled exquisitely; "I am a chip." "Thou art a chip—Thou art a chip," Angelica responded. "We are both chips," they concluded harmoniously—"chips off the old—old block! And as it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen!" (HT 31)

This composition is not indented, but is italicized, again giving a visual marker to the reader of change from spoken word to sung. It is difficult to say whether this was meant to be an original composition, or whether a Victorian reader would have recognized it as a parody of an existing melody—the end of the twins' tune echoes the doxology "Gloria Patri," but not exactly, and the rest of the song seems original. Either way, for readers now, the act of reading this song involves musical composition in one's head, and regardless of familiarity with the tune, the twins' call and response and harmonies must be imagined along with the words. Readers will thus be processing music and words simultaneously, and composing the melody themselves. This comic song is similarly invoked later in the novel, when the Boy plays a piece which seems to be of Angelica's creation (and therefore Grand's, and thirdly the reader's): "[The Boy] took up his violin and played a plaintive air, to which he chanted, 'There was a merry dromedary / Waltzing on the plain; / Dromedary waltzing, dromedary prancing. / And all the people said, it is a sign of rain / When they saw the good beast dancing'" (HT 389). Again, while the rhyme is original, the cadence of the song may have been immediately recognizable to a Victorian audience, but maybe not—and it is certainly not recognizable now. Here, the reader imagines both the violin's "plaintive air" and the Boy's rhythmic chant, creating layers of meta writing: there is an act of melopoetic composition inspired by a melopoetic composition within a larger melopoetic composition.

<31> The songs Grand uses are not strictly humorous jingles, however, and some are eminently recognizable. In particular, religious hymns appear frequently, usually sung by the Tenor, and written in evocative musical language:

The words of adoration, “Sancta Maria, Sancta Dei Genetrix, Sancta Virgo virginum,” were uttered evenly on notes that admitted of the tenderest expression, while the supplication, the “Ora pro nobis,” rose to the full compass of the singer’s voice, and was delivered in tones of passionate entreaty. At the end, in the “Agnus Dei,” the music changed, dropping into the minor with impressive effect. (*HT* 372)

Readers familiar with the hymns would have a pre-set melody in their heads, which plays while they read the words; those who are unfamiliar have still been given enough direction from Grand to hear the Latin chant and the minor chord resolution at the end of the well-known invocation, “Agnus Dei.” Not satisfied with the assumption that most readers will know the hymn, Grand makes sure the song is carefully noted by writing the lyrics out in full, indented from the text: “Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, parce nobis Domine, / Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, exaudi nos Domine, / Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis” (*HT* 372). The music is teased out further when the narration describes the Tenor whistling it all morning; to really reinforce the melody in the reader’s minds, Grand writes the first line again: “Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, parce nobis Domine” (*HT* 372). Then, once more, the third line is recited as part of the text on the following page (*HT* 373). Thus, the familiar strains of the “Agnus Dei” ring in the reader’s mind throughout this section of the novel.

<32> There is one musical composition in the novel which is certainly Grand’s, and which illustrates the melopoetic compositional elements of *The Heavenly Twins*: Grand wrote both a narrative and a song, one woven into the other, and running simultaneously. Grand tells the reader that the song, which appears in the Tenor’s dream, does not correspond to any known melody. The Tenor hears himself singing, and “the words to which the music shaped itself in his mind were not the words of any song he knew”:

These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
Are melted into air, into thin air:
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capp’d towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself;
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve;
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a wreck behind. We are such stuff

As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep. (*HT* 386)

The narrative then returns: “The last words repeated themselves over and over again, on different notes and in another key each time, and with such powerful emphasis that at last it aroused the Tenor” (*HT* 387). The final lines, repeated with a different melody and key signature, are from Prospero’s dialogue in *The Tempest*, but the musical addition is Grand’s—and the reader’s. Grand gives little musical help here, leaving readers free to interpret the song as they choose. The melody will thus be different for every reader, and different from how Grand heard it, and perhaps different every time it is read, even by the same person; the song contains infinite compositional possibilities. Grand’s extensive employment of verbal music creates a melopoetic composition, a novel which is consistently punctuated by song.

<33> Egerton makes similar use of verbal music in her compositions, but is more given to using known melodies and, in keeping with her subject matter, often uses music in moments of discord. A known melody, for example, is used at the start of “Now Spring Has Come,” which begins with lyrics to a song: “When the spring time comes, gentle Annie, and the flowers are / blossoming on the plain! / Lal, lal, la, la, la, lallallalla, lal, lal, lal, la, la, la, la, / When the spring time comes, gentle Annie, and the mockin’ bird is / singing on the tree!” (*K* 37). The lyrics are to a song called “Gentle Annie,” but they are mismanaged by the singer, which the first line’s speaker points out. The lyrics are dictated as a person would absentmindedly sing them, and make the story’s opening lines a melopoetic blending of singing and speaking. Though this usage of “Gentle Annie” is itself gentle enough, music is more commonly used in disturbing moments, as when, in “Under Northern Sky,” the household staff sings in an effort to protect themselves and the livestock from the drunken violence of the master (*K* 131). Marie Larson, demon exorciser, calms the master with her song while the reader creates the melody: She “commences in Norwegian a sing-song recitative like the drowsy buzz of a fly on a pane. ‘Yesterday we had a bazaar, a bazaar in the school-house, a bazaar for the poor black heathens in Africa. For the poor black heathens lost in the darkness of unbelief, and ignorant of the saving of the Lamb—oh, it was a blessed work!’” (*K* 135). Marie’s Norwegian sing-song is as audible to the reader as it was to the characters. The master resists, so Marie “starts a key higher,” giving a notational directive to the reader, and she finishes each section of dialogue with slight variations on a repeated lyric: “S-s-s, you be quiet, Marie tell you tale” (136) and “No, no, you be quiet, Marie tell tale” (*K* 137). The music gets “louder and louder,” now accompanied by his “swearing deeper”—the orchestra swells. Egerton herself even describes his verbalizations as “a deep accompaniment” to Marie’s “shriller sermon, with its sanctimonious sing-song tune and unctuous phrasing” (*K* 138). Marie’s holier-than-thou singing thus appears in noted dissonance to the master’s low cursing, from the language used to the register in which it sounds. The discord ends when Marie “breaks into a hymn,” the master falls

asleep, and the composition ends with the “quavering old woman’s voice [dying] away in an abortive hallelujah!” (K 139).

<34> In *Discords*, music is further used to create discord, perhaps most notably in the “Polly Witfoet” scenes that pepper “A Psychological Moment at Three Periods.” The song is played on a hurdy-gurdy in a pagoda, and is described as “well known through Holland and South Africa” (D 16)—a familiar tune to some. Egerton sets nonsense syllables off from the text to illustrate the melody: “Lal, la, la, la; la, la, la, la, lallallallallala” (D 16), leaving much room for the reader’s interpretation of the song. Then, suddenly, the happy scene is broken when the young girl notices something in the pagoda:

An idiot lad is turning the handle of the hurdy-gurdy. He is fastened by a leathern strap round his middle to the pole in the centre of the tent. His head is abnormally large, the heavy eyelids lie half folded on the prominent eyeballs so that only the whites show, his damp hair clings to his temples and about his outstanding ears. His mouth gapes, and his long tongue lolls from side to side, the saliva forming little bubbles as the great head wags heavily as he grinds—indeed every part of his stunted, sweat-dripping body sways mechanically to the lively air of white-footed Polly. “Polly Witfoet, Polly Witfoet, lallallallallala!” (D 17)

Here is the clash of the G sharp and F sharp. Suddenly, the formerly light-hearted song is now the soundtrack to a disturbing scene of abuse and violence, the depth of its pain in contrast to the playful song and the fun of the carnival. The girl is arrested by the sight of the boy, observing him “with ever-growing indignation and disgust,” watching as “the heavy lids seem to droop more, the tongue to loll longer, the face to wax paler. Save for the strap the scarcely human form would topple over with weariness. A whip is leaning up against the framework” (D 17). The tension is almost unbearable, and readers want to cover their ears and not hear the awful song just as much as the young girl does—but Egerton will not let it happen. “Polly Witfoet, Polly Witfoet, lallallallallala!” (D 18). The boy makes the music, which is now terrible, but which sounds in the reader’s mind regardless. The girl sees that the boy “has laid down his monstrous shock-head on top of the hurdy-gurdy, and is drawing his breath in hard, shuddering gasps; but the swollen hand with the knotted fingers still grips the handle with a convulsive tension, ready to grind again” (D 18). The scene, and the song, are disturbing, unsettling; the reader/listener is uncomfortable, and wishes for the song/story to cease, or at least resolve to a major chord and end the discord. The girl undergoes a crisis of faith, wondering what God would create “such a creature when he knew where the poor thing would end up,” exclaiming that “always I see the pain, the sorrow, underneath the music” (D 19). The section concludes with “the refrain of the common tune, ‘Polly Witfoet, Polly Witfoet, lallallallallala!’” (D 20). In a sense this is the resolution of the chord: it finishes on a happy refrain, but the song is now

soundly associated with the imagery of the poor, tragic boy, and the noise is disquieting.

<35> Egerton returns to the melody of “Polly Witfoet” later in the story. In the third section, a woman is being blackmailed into becoming a man’s mistress. She desires neither the role nor the man, and is forced into it. As the man plays “a trump card,” she suddenly hears a hurdy-gurdy “grinding out ‘Polly Witfoet, Polly Witfoet, lallallallallala!’ She starts, knitting her brows in vain endeavour to find what the tune brings back to her” (*D* 29). It is clear what the tune brings back to the reader. Now, the bouncy polka about white-footed Polly—happy enough to be chosen as the background music for a carnival—is the cue for images of a dying disabled boy and a woman being forced into “ruin.” “Polly Witfoet” is clearly the melody of “A Psychological Moment,” and it comes in striking dissonance to the horrific scenes it accompanies. This juxtaposition of pleasant folk song against heartbreaking moment is again used in “Wedlock”, when a workman “is whistling ‘Barbara Allen’ softly as he pats down a brick and scrapes the mortar neatly off the joining” (*D* 116). Providing both melody and rhythm, the workman whistles on, then “singing with a sweet tenor” (*D* 118). While this melody is playing, a drunken woman returns to her house. The woman, who has an illegitimate child, married her husband with the promise of her child coming to live with them. Not only did the husband renege on his agreement, but he hid letters summoning the woman to her dying child’s bedside. In the end, the woman kills her husband’s children (*D* 144). “Barbara Allen” is a song about death and love, and therefore the choice is fitting; nevertheless, the popular and beautiful folk song creates a poignant musical backdrop to the tragic scene, a melody against the discord.(5)

<36> Throughout her writing, soundscape remains a focus for Egerton, whether there is music or not. All of the references to music amount to a near-constant hum of song in the reader’s mind as s/he progresses through the stories. The writer is engaging in melopoetic composition, and inviting the reader to do so, as well. The tones of the songs shift, some are familiar and some are not, some are in English, some Norwegian (*K* 169), but again, amongst the variety of songs one element remains constant: literary music, or melopoesis.

<37> In *The Heavenly Twins*, Grand writes of the Frayling family’s attitude toward Evadne’s intellectual development that “it was as if her people were satisfied that by enforcing silence they could prevent thought” (*HT* 20). Similarly, it was as if Grand’s family, Victorian society, and the music industry were satisfied that by enforcing women’s silence they could prevent musical composition. Grand found a way to prove the opposite: writing music, but disguising it in a more acceptable compositional medium—the novel. Grand and Egerton—and other New Woman writers who have been neglected here—went beyond the limits of their art and composition and created their own unique styles of writing which encompassed the world of literature and music. The incorporation of musical analysis gives the reader of New Woman

fiction an entirely new mode of understanding the stories they wrote and the language they used, and a new appreciation of the subversive ways they pushed against the restrictions of the time. Delia da Sousa Correa writes that “attention to music and sound makes us better able to ‘hear’ as well as to ‘see’ as we read” (“Soundscapes” 20). Hearing *and* seeing while reading is the very core of this argument, providing a common denominator, or a keynote. In 1996, Claudia Stanger wrote that “musico-literary criticism has not yet developed the methods, models, or vocabulary to deal effectively with radical musical experiments with language” (196). Progress has been made since, and the work undertaken here on the New Woman writers’ experimentation with melopoetic composition will hopefully add to this continuing development.

Endnotes

(1) *Untwisting the Serpent* (33).[\(▲\)](#)

(2) “The School of Giorgione” (106).[\(▲\)](#)

(3) Others who have read Grand and Egerton as Modernist include Gerd Bjorhovde (*Rebellious Structures*. Oxford University Press, 1988) and Tina O’Toole (“Keynotes from Millstreet, Co.Cork: George Egerton’s Transgressive Fictions.” *Irish Women Novelists 1800-1940*. Ed. Anne Fogarty. Spec. issue *Colby Quarterly* 2 (June 2000) 145-156).[\(▲\)](#)

(4) For more information on, and continued analysis of, the chime, please see my article “He, watching over Morningquest: The Chime’s Musical Performance in Sarah Grand’s *The Heavenly Twins*.” *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies* 16.2 (2014). 348-365.[\(▲\)](#)

(5) For a detailed discussion of music and trauma in George Egerton’s short stories, please see my article “The Elusive Melody: Music and Trauma in New Woman Short Stories” in the forthcoming essay collection *British Women Short Story Writers: New Woman to Now*. Eds. Emma Young and James Bailey. Edinburgh University Press, 2015.[\(▲\)](#)

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